

THE MEDIATED LEARNING EXPERIENCE (MLE) THEORY IN MEANINGFUL LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

According to Feuerstein Method, people can improve their learning, thinking and analyzing skills. In addition, meaningful instruction for all children is the mediated relationship. It is a fact that everyone has the immeasurable ability to enhance their learning aptitude and heighten their intelligence. In this context, thinking, analyzing and thinking works together for a full learning experience. This study aims to investigate the importance and productive influence of the Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) theory within the context of meaningful foreign language instruction. Fundamentally, the study discusses in what manner the enriched learning environment suggested in MLE affects both disadvantaged learners and the language instructor. The study group comprises of the participants selected randomly among the students ranging from 2nd to 8th grades at a secondary school located in a village, Akören, in Konya, Turkey. The data is obtained with the help of the observation forms and semi-structured interview forms developed for this purpose. The findings indicate that MLE has significant impact on and contributions to the meaningful foreign language learning supporting thinking and analyzing skills.

Keywords: Meaningful instruction, mediated relationship, learning experience, MLE.

INTRODUCTION

The world today is inarguably too different not to be compared with the world before, since human beings are anticipated to adapt themselves towards multiple decisions and crossroads. The ones exposed to numerous stimuli even a day long need to think sophisticated to resist rapid changes and identify their outcomes among different ways, thus benefiting the community itself. Hence, the ultimate objectives of today's education are to provide "the development of thinking and the development of the orientation" (Feuerstein et al., 2010). Reuven Feuerstein, a cognitive psychologist, considers cognition as an adaptive and changeable process, enabling an individual to set and organize a great deal of information and data happening in the environment. What is of significant importance is to expose individuals to various stimuli so as to initiate awareness, offer experience and expand consciousness; hence, to conduct to meaningful adaptation to the world and to deeper understanding. A student is required to be prepared against the technological environment and its rapid development like the one having already gained sharp perception, grasping important aspects beyond certain situations, solving complex-problems and deciding rational solutions. These demands of the ever-changing world entail "the process of self-adaptation and modification" (Feuerstein et al., 2010).

The focus of this article is specifically on MLE interactions and exploring their effectiveness of modifiability to enhance children's cognitive development, based on Feuerstein's theory of the Mediated Learning Experience (MLE). The study aims at pointing out the essential idea that the cognitive functioning of a child can be meaningfully modified through mediated learning experiences. The study group is composed of the students in a village, in Konya, Turkey. The village and the school is a setting where there are limited opportunities and insufficient capacity to reach vital sources of learning and instruction.

Mediated Learning Experience Theory and Cognitive Modifiability

Feuerstein puts through the Mediated Learning Experience Theory (MLE) due to his belief in the idea that intelligence is modifiable, which is based on Cognitive Modifiability. Feuerstein attaches remarkable importance and influence on the development of cognitive modifiability that is a process to build the brain's capacity and to facilitate intellectual growth through deeper learning (Shay, 2017). An effective learning process outcomes with the aid of the applications of mediated learning experiences offered by Feuerstein. MLE envisages an effective interaction of the human organism; that is, the learner, with the environment via a human mediator, which occurs through systematic, experiential and structural exposure to stimuli (Feuerstein et al., 2010). Mediated learning is basically an opposite movement that can be seen the replacement of the behaviourist's model by more cognitive. Fundamentally, mediated learning propounds a mediator, generally a teacher, a parent and a caregiver responsible for a child's development sort out relevant from irrelevant.

There is a common but deceptive belief in the power of learning through direct exposure and experience. The preconceived perception of intelligence as an innate and hereditary part of human beings has gradually replaced by the fact that intelligence is modifiable. On the other hand, Feuerstein maintains that the genetic or hereditary influence of intelligence cannot be disregarded, but it is not acceptable as the end of one's story (Feuerstein et al., 2010). Accordingly, what makes Feuerstein different from others, especially from contemporaries, and to step forward beyond the traditions is the reality that while others are interested in changing only materials for learners in accordance with their difficulties in learning, Feuerstein intensively focuses on modifying the learners at first hand. Feuerstein aims at enriching the individual's environment to develop adaptable capacities for a better life rather than shaping the circumstances according to his/her current level (Feuerstein, Rand and Rynders, 1988). Furthermore, Feuerstein pays close attention to "*the inner structure of cognition*" and the ways to learn "*how to learn*" apart from the context itself (Seng, 2003). During the application of the MLE process, the child as a mediatee initiates to internalize the external stimuli, which triggers and facilitates "an integrated mechanism of change with the child" by means of modifying meaningful intervention or interaction (Tzuriel, 2013). The appropriately applied MLE process helps learners act independently and think and imagine holistically on diverse contexts through self-mediation.

Unfortunately, the works of Feuerstein and his theory of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) cannot come to light deservedly. Notwithstanding, its concern, becoming well-known only in the 1990s, to disadvantaged learners can find its way into wider applications in terms of contemporary classroom teaching.

According to the MLE theory, learning is conducted by two types of situations; direct learning that is a spontaneous and unmediated exposure to the stimuli, and mediated learning that describes an intended qualified interaction between a mediator and a learner as seen in Figure 1.

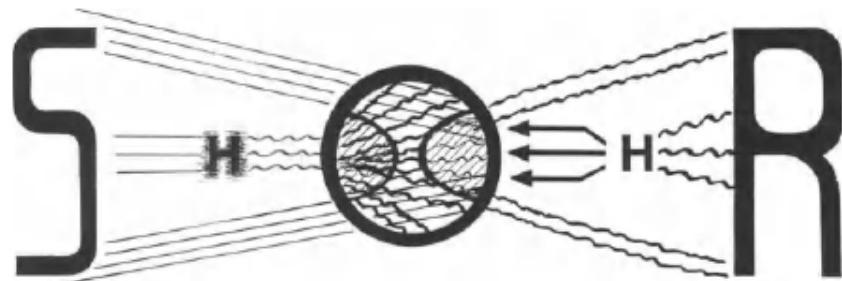


Figure 1: The mediated learning experience (MLE) model taken from *Don't Accept me as I am, Helping "Retarded" People to Excel* by Feuerstein R. & Rand, Y. & Rynders, E.J. (1988).

The direct approach is based on Piaget's formula of **S-O-R**. It must be noted that Feuerstein was once a student of Jean Piaget. In this model, the direct exposure can be explained as random; that is, unmediated and incidental relation of individuals within the stimuli in their environment. In Figure 1, the arrows at the top and bottom out of the stimuli (S) towards the organism (O, representing a learner) indicate a direct exposure. On the other hand, Feuerstein reforms and develops Piaget's formula of **S-O-R** by attaching a human mediator (H) between the stimuli (S), the organism (O). As seen in Figure 1, the arrows from the S to the H (Human) and then from the H to the O are represented by MLE interaction that coordinated by an experienced adult- generally a child's parent. Shown with the H symbol, the mediator offers the stimuli to the learner as s/he modifies "their frequency, order, intensity, and context; by arousing in the children curiosity, vigilance, and perceptual acuity; and by trying to improve and/ or create in the child the cognitive functions [...]" (Tzuriel, 2013).

Piaget's theory accepts simple and active but spontaneous interaction with the outside world enough to improve cognitive development and construct thinking schemata. The active dialogue with nature without any modification is insufficient to derive the most benefit from the encountered sets. Learning mostly takes place through direct experiences; that is, we see things, hear voices, and grasp them. Feuerstein indicates that, as the most adapted learning process, learning through direct experiences can correspond to neither the meaningful learning, nor the potential for modifiability. From this point of view, MLE explicitly offers modifiable interactions. The mediation process is carried out intentionally to form one's interaction with the world and to shape the experience (Feuerstein et al., 2010).

Within the scope of this approach, there is no importance or consideration for the role of a human "as a bearer of the human culture that has accumulated over thousands of generations and as its transmitter." In essence, MLE is an active method of experience as a result of the interaction with the world itself. Within a mediated learning process, a human mediator is more of an issue to guide or modify the meaningful learning; "*the organism (O) being directly exposed to stimulus (S) reacts and responds (R) with skill and completeness only after the characteristics of the stimulus have been sorted out, classified, differentiated, shaped and adapted, and organized by a mature human mediator (H)*" (Feuerstein et al., 2010). The mediator (H) is flexible and "elastic." S/he adjusts mediation based on the learner's phase of learning and the difficulty and improvement level. In other words, a meditational process is related to the mediatee's cognitive functions, deficiencies in learning abilities, motivation, behaviours and needs. Herein, a human mediator takes the greatest responsibility for overcoming the limited potentials to mediate and to develop deeper understanding effectively.

Feuerstein provides 12 criteria considering MLE; however, he also indicates that only the first three criteria can be considered sufficient and universal, and required to adapt the MLE interactions to the processes. These are intentionality and reciprocity, meaning, and transcendence, which are regarded as universal since there can be found certain traces of which in all races, cultures and ethnic groups (Tzuriel, 2013).

Intentionality and Reciprocity

Intentional mediation comes out when the mediator deliberately and systematically aims to change and guides the child's alertness, perception and awareness by interpreting the specific stimuli to convey an explicit intention to the child so that the content can be more understandable, salient and meaningful through the process. Nevertheless, focusing merely on changing the stimuli is not adequate for MLE interactions. Reciprocity implies an exchange of responses to the stimuli between the mediator and the mediatee. In this relational aspect, the mediatee is frankly set to the input given by the mediator and presents any respond verbally or nonverbally to it. At this stage, the mediator proposes another adjustment for the mediatee's flow of the responses to having the stimuli grasped by him/her as a result of the mediator's observations. According to Tzuriel (2013), this process is vital for the "*ignition*" of the MLE interventions.

Mediation of meaning

There can be mentioned the mediation of meaning in the time when the mediator explains and emphasizes the significance and necessity of the presented stimuli. Feuerstein and Feuerstein state that the mediation of meaning as "what creates the motivational and emotional forces that drive our activity and our behaviour" (Feuerstein et al., 2010). To put forward "*whys and wherefores*" of the intended content triggers the attention of the mediatee and makes the meaning reasonable, substantive and apprehensible, thus conducting the mediatee to challenge and go beyond the given cases or phenomena so as to build up his/her intrinsic motivation and self-awareness, which sets up the background of the main criterion; that is, transcendence (Brown, 2002).

Transcendence

The transcendental part of the MLE interaction constitutes the need to overstep the intended task. It substantially indicates "the transfer of learning across context and situations" (Seng, 2003). The need of *learn how to learn* occurs and the learner transmits what is learnt to the real life situations and creates a new one beyond direct experience, thus "resulting flexibility and creativity of response".

There are two categories that cause lack of MLE; the former of which is the lack of the ability of the child to get benefit from the mediational process due to his/her mental or physical disabilities, and the latter is the lack of environmental opportunities that are the cases this study basically concerns with. This situation might be related to parents' inadequate education level, negative events that the child has experienced before, unqualified applications of the MLE strategies. MLE interactions mediate the stimuli according to the individual differences in learning caused by poverty, economic status and physical depict. These barriers can be eliminated within the application of the process of modifiability. But what is of importance is to realize the barrier and offer supporting and effective activities for the potential (Feuerstein et al., 2010). Several different kinds of methods are taken into consideration in the process of mediating students in their learning periods. These methods substitute for a mediator to empower effective learning within an enriched environment. It is essential to figure out that cognitive and intellectual skills of disadvantaged students having a potential to learn, but being lack of equal opportunities due to their areas of residence that are out of both the distinct and province can be modified to gain utmost benefit from experiences and interactions with the outside world. Feuerstein indicates that these students are culturally deprived of required learning situations; as a result, their modifiability is restricted by the insufficiency and failure to fulfilment in reaching learning opportunities.

The Aim of the Study

Mediated Learning applications provide educators and teachers to actively modify the thinking ability of the students who are disadvantaged. The objectives of this approach are not to overcome a difficulty or teach a specific skill but to teach learners how to learn in order to cope with different situations. Together with the help of the Mediated Learning, learners experience certain changes at their cognitive levels which enable the learners to become independent, flexible and efficient. Adequate mediation is needed to arouse motivation, attention and curiosity, thus focusing on specific situations and providing meanings to stimuli and activating internalization of what to be learnt. Within the framework of this study, adequate mediation processes have been conducted through a human mediator in a form of organized learning activities. One of the central concerns of this study is to find out what cognitive activities can be performed with learners to help them internalize the new experiences and how effective and functional the mediating processes are in particular.

METHOD

A qualitative research approach is applied for this study. In this study investigating the importance and productive influence of Reuven Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) within the context of meaningful foreign language instruction, the data is obtained with the help of the semi-structured interview and observation forms developed for this purpose. The underlying reason behind why this method is followed is to accurately describe the opinions and feelings of both the learners

and the language instructor in detail. Essentially, the semi-structured interviews are widely used conversational meetings holding remarkable potential together with its flexibility "to address specific dimension of [...] research question while leaving space for study participants to offer new meanings to the topic of the study" (Galletta, 2013). Different from formal interviews, which are practiced a set of rigid questions asked for interviewees, semi-structured interviews can be claimed as a unique method to *uncover* "the motivations behind people's choices and behaviors, their attitudes and beliefs" (Raworth, Sweetman, Narayan, Rowlands and Hopkins, 2012).

The other method that is used in the framework of this study is conducted as an observation method which is an empirical research followed literally by the language instructor as to construct casual explanations and "to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method" (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). In this context, a case scenario exploring intended activities in a secondary school class was held by the researcher herself as a mediator to illustrate how MLE process was brought out by emphasizing the MLE parameters. The study group comprises of the 7th grade students, selected randomly among the students ranging from 2nd to 8th grades, in the school. In particular, the study is limited to possibilities and facilities of a secondary school located in a village of Akören, in Konya, Turkey.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data of this study has been obtained with the help of two instruments. The semi-structured interview forms consisting of three open-ended questions that allow the interviewee flexibility, developed by the researchers, were effectively utilized, and the data was obtained from the transcripts recorded and notes taken by the researcher during the interviews. And, the observation forms, inspired by the influential studies of Tan Oon Seng (2003) and developed by the researchers were effectively utilized, and the data was obtained from the notes and codes taken by the researcher during the observation process.

Before starting both the interviews and the video recording, the selected students were provided with a detailed overview of the purpose, taken permission for the recording and note-taking and also explained intended usages for the data by guaranteeing anonymity. The video recordings were firstly turned into the text carefully and made an authentic translation in English by the researcher. Additionally, the data from the observation notes of the researchers were gathered by observing the behaviours and attitudes that the participants displayed within natural environments. Eventually, the data obtained at the end of the research process were evaluated through interpreting and coding textual method. The ultimate findings were considered to figure out the effectiveness of the mediation process applied at class and the differentiation between the mediation process and the one applied before.

FINDINGS

Observation Process and Application of Mediation Interaction

The researches on MLE processes have been carried out mostly by videotaping and note-taking of the interaction during the classes and analyzing them later by the researcher using an observation form developed for this purpose. After this processes, the results have been coded in the form under appropriate parts that are determined in accordance with the three universal criteria of the Mediated Learning Experience; Intentionality and Reciprocity, Transcendence, and Meaning. To illustrate when the mediator tries to focus the learners' attention on the stimuli, it has been coded as *Intentionality*, and when the learners response it, it has been noted as *Reciprocity*. When the mediator goes beyond a general rule or a concept, this process has been coded as *Transcendence*. Besides, *Meaning* has been coded at the time when the mediator offers the main purpose of an activity.

The findings obtained at the end offer an elaboration of the MLE theory. The effects of distal factors; that is, socio-cultural deprivations and poverty, on children's cognitive modifiability have considerable effects on children's cognitive modifiability. As a mediation process is applied, the enhancement use

of MLE strategies can reduce the effects of the distal factors on cognitive modifiability. The case scenario of an English lesson presented in Table 1.

Table 1: A Classroom Scenario of MLE

<i>Stage 1</i>	It is another English lesson for the 7th grade students. The teacher comes into the classroom with different chemical materials to arouse a sense of excitement and curiosity. Besides, the teacher informs the students that they are going to watch some informative videos during the lesson.
<i>Stage 2</i>	The teacher announces to the class "We are going to learn phrases and vocabulary about environment and to write short and simple messages about the environment." Also, the teacher adds with a determined and gentle voice that "We are going to learn important issues for our world."
<i>Stage 3</i>	The teacher asks that "We do not have another planet to live in, and we have some duties and obligations towards our world, right? Do you think that we are responsible for it?" The students say "Yes" as a reply.
<i>Stage 4</i>	The teacher and the students study on certain vocabulary and phrases to use later, and the teacher recalls of necessary information and review the modals "must" and "should" to help them put to use in their writings during the next process. Later, they all watch different important videos about our planet, global warming and the negative effects of it. This part is followed by some critical questions directed by the teacher in order to make the students to think on our planet. The teacher asks "Why is our planet in danger?" "Why is there a global warming?" What do you think the problem is?" "What and who cause the global warming?" "How do we prevent it?" "What should we do as human beings?"
<i>Stage 5</i>	During this part of the lesson, the students are divided into groups to work with each other. Each group is expected to make a poster about our environment, choose a slogan for our planet and determine what to do for a better world. Every poster of the groups has a unique and different pattern depending on the students' creativity. Then, they are supposed to go beyond the class itself. They show their posters to other friends from a different city, and tell them why they prepare such a poster.
Note: By the end of the class, almost all students are able to understand and identify specific information in various activities about our planet. The students have remarked that "I know my responsibilities for our planet and I can express them in English."	

Table 1 demonstrates several activities to carry out the interaction the teacher and the students. When considered Table 2, it figures out the quality interaction between the teacher as a mediator and the students as mediatees and how parameters are applied.

Table 2: MLE Parameters applied in the case scenario

Scenario	MLE Parameters	Key "observations" about the learners and the teacher
Stage 1	GO (Goal seeking) IR (Intentionality and Reciprocity)	The learners: There was excitement and curiosity. The teacher: She offered obvious learning objectives, different learning materials and attentive planning.
Stage 2	IR (Intentionality and Reciprocity)	The learners: They were basically provided with what to be learned. The teacher: There was a clear intention and explicit purpose about what to teach.
Stage 3	ME (Mediation of Meaning) IR (Intentionality and Reciprocity)	The learners: There was the awareness of meaning. The teacher: She provided them with some explanations and tried to ensure engagement of students' attention

		and interest by asking questions.
Stage 4	IR (Intentionality and Reciprocity) RP (Reflective Practice)	The learners: They are to recall and think critically about the knowledge, reflecting it to their outcomes. The teacher: She fostered thinking and learning in new and different circumstances.
Stage 5	T (Transcendence) FC (Feeling Competence)	The learners: They were provided learning across context and transferring knowledge to various situations. They were able to state "I know." The teacher: She facilitated creativity and fostered thinking about critical solutions for a problem. She gained a sense of competence for the students while transferring their knowledge to another setting.

At *Stage 1*, it is possible to see the first encounter of the students with the stimuli. The teacher came to the class with different materials related to the subject to raise students' curiosity and eagerness to learn. The attention of the students tended towards the interaction with the teacher. This stage refers to *Intentionality* that guides the students' awareness.

During *Stage 2*, the teacher provided the students with an explicit intention of the lesson and acquainted them with what to be learnt. This stage is also related to *Intentionality* that gives an expressed goal to the students.

For Stage 3, the teacher offered the meaning of the stimuli by giving some explanation about the subject. This process offers a meaningful context referring to *Mediation of Meaning*. During the following steps, the mediator fostered critical thinking process by asking some questions. The students returned with positive responses corresponding to *Reciprocity* that is one of the important criteria of MLE. During this stage, she provided a critic response from the students to her intention.

At *Stage 4*, the students were expected to reflect their previous knowledge about the subject called Modals to another situation. Additionally, in order to apply *Intentionality*, process questioning was used in the cognitive process. The teacher asked several questions, and the questions were to challenge the process itself. This refers to the idea that the teacher asked "why" and "how" question: "Why is our planet in danger?" These question forms are significantly important as a cognitive tool since they lead the learners to focus on thinking processes, to analyze and identify the problem itself and encourage them to conceive the situations critically.

Stage 5 encourages the learners to think of different applications of the strategies about the matter in question, which refers to *Transcendence*. The teacher provided them with a task, directing actively toward the solution. The learners were supposed to work and learn together. They transferred and adapted their learning into daily life situations to arouse awareness against the planet. The teacher allowed them to act independently, encouraged creativity and productivity and reinforced their feeling of competence, which leads to the participatory behaviour in the learners.

After these application processes, the teacher carried out short interviews with the students to find out what the students thought about the lesson. When considered the transcripts and the summarized information from the interviews, the data was phrased and translated into English by the researcher according to the students' answers:

Student A said: *We are informed about what to be learnt and we become ready for the lesson. When we use different materials, our lessons are more enjoyable. We learn better than before.*

Student B stated: *I am not bored during the lessons. I know why we learn English. Today we have created different posters and written our slogans. It is a good way to pay attention to global warming.*

Student C said: *Now, I am much more eager to learn English. We use the language in different situations.*

Student D remarked: *I love English classes. Our teacher sets different activities to make our English useful. I like these kinds of activities.*

The statements of the students enlighten that the applied processes provide more effective life-wide and social learning and mediate cognitive development in the learners. These interactions mediate the meaning of the world to the students. They help the students to comprehend clearly events, objects and situations. It is through mediated learning experiences that the language learning context becomes meaningful, and an in-depth understanding occurs. The learners can use various vocabularies and demonstrate greater performance, and becoming more enthusiastic and engaged in learning. This systematic training proposed by the MLE theory modifies the structure of learner's cognitive potential and ensures the acquisition of basic concepts and the development of the active learning attitude, "*comparative behaviour, systematic search, problem definition, planning*" (Seng, 1997). Mediated learning sessions can develop learners' ability and skills and strengthen their task-intrinsic motivation, empowering a sense of self-confidence and helping them to take responsibility for their own learning. As a result, the students become able to develop an appropriate thinking and behaviour to situations and stimulus.

The key aspect is that the focus of the meditation is on the process of learning rather than on the output at the end. Students are opened up an opportunity to apply what they have learned in other context and to discuss it. The teacher as a mediator has a role to guide but not to dominate the process, thus overreaching "*a scripted transmission model*" (Yarmus and Vagliardo, 2014). Therefore, teachers' responsibility is not to design multiple presentations of the context but to engage students in the expression of learning to make them internalize their understandings.

DISCUSSION

The theory of Feuerstein indicates the possibility of modifying intelligence through a systematic, structural and adequate provision of mediated learning experience that contributes to the functioning of human beings. Mediated learning experience purposefully shapes human experience and the development of human beings. Essentially, MLE promotes a qualified interaction between the mediatee and the stimulus mediated by a human that releases "*flexibility, sensitivity, readiness and desire to understand what is going on, and capacity to generalize it over and above the isolated phenomenon that is being expected*" (Feuerstein et al., 2010). On the other hand, lack of MLE results in a deprived and reduced modifiability of the human organism. For that reason this study is mainly conducted with the students who continue their lives in a socially limited environment and have negative socio-economic conditions affecting the capacity of the auto-plasticity of them. The empirical findings of this research demonstrate the effects of the cognitive studies on students' potential for modifiability. Additionally, MLE has significant impacts and contributions on the meaningful foreign language learning with the help of thinking and analyzing skills. When considered from another point of view, the MLE model provides teachers to reconsider their roles as a mediator. MLE gives a role of being "*facilitators of the learning*", "*mediators of knowledge source*", "*mediators of lifelong learning*", and "*designers of the learning environment*" (Seng, 2003). Fundamentally, the study discusses in what manner the enriched learning environment suggested in MLE affects both disadvantaged learners and the language instructor.

One of the reasons that prevents the changes within the learners who need special education is the homogenous environment in which the learners are expected to function at a same level. These motivation-blocking environments drag the learners to "a passive approach that accepts the persons as they are and does everything to prevent the appearance to tension between current levels of

functioning and the level required in a modification-encouraging environment" (Feuerstein et al., 2010). Not embracing the notion of modifying the situation causes to accept a person passively. Hence, the MLE theory is basically based on the belief in even the slightest possibility in modification. What educators need is to comprehend and appreciate the essential message of the MLE theory that enables new perspectives, skills, awareness and acquisitions. All educators should voluntarily take action to modify their learners with "an active, continuous, and multifaceted development and application of strategies." When considered in this point, educators are expected to leave their role of "a content disseminator" and take the responsibility to act as a facilitator who brings forth meaningful learning, self-competence, intentional behaviours and familiarity with novelty (Feuerstein et al., 2010).

Mediation process is invariably applicable and beneficial even if learners cannot have an opportunity to receive an appropriate mediation in time and become late to modify themselves regardless of the various barriers such as environmental problems, socio-economic conditions and mental disorders. I am personally of opinion of disseminating the MLE theory around the country and elaborating the concept of the MLE processes as one component within a holistic framework in addition to the national curriculum. As Feuerstein et al. remark, "Every change that takes place in a part changes the whole to which it belongs" (Feuerstein et al., 2010).

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